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Max S. Baucus

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Baucus, Max S., "Montana Trial Attorneys" (July 31, 2003). *Max S. Baucus Speeches and Remarks*. 756.
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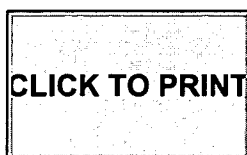
MONTH/YEAR of Records*: **July-2003**

(1) Subject*: **Health Care**

(select subject from controlled vocabulary, if your office has one)

(2) Subject*

DOCUMENT DATE*: **07/31/2003**



BAUCUS

Speech to the Montana Trial Attorneys July 31, 2003

Hello everybody. Max here. I'm sorry I can't be with you in person today. Senate business has kept me here in Washington. Right now I'm working with members of Congress to provide quality, affordable prescription drugs for all seniors.

I want to thank the Montana Trial Attorneys Association for bringing everybody together. I want you to know how much I appreciate your friendship over the years. Thanks for all you do.

I especially want to say hello to your president -- my friend and high school classmate Mike Meloy. The Meloy family has been active in public and community service for decades. And a big thanks to executive director Al Smith. Thanks for your hard work and dedication Al and Mike. You guys are aces!

I want to stress how important all of you are to the people of Montana. We all have the same vision: doing what's right for Montana. I applaud each and every one of you for your dedication and belief every person in Montana deserves to have equal access to justice.

All Americans should have their day in court and to receive just compensation for their injuries that's why I voted against proceeding to S. 11 ---- that's the medical malpractice reform bill in the Senate. Bringing up such an extreme bill was clearly a political move, and it showed. The vote fell far short of the 60 needed.

That bill isn't the right solution for the people of Montana – or the nation. It wouldn't help to bring down health care and insurance costs for patients and doctors in Montana. Additionally, it went far beyond what Montana has already done in reforming its own med-mal laws.

It's clear we need to tackle some of the very real problems facing our health care system. That's why I've put together a Health Care Cost Task Force to come up with a Montana-made proposal. I invited a cross section of Montana trial attorneys, physicians and private business folks to come to the table and work together on a common-sense solution.

The task force has already met twice. I'll meet with them in just a few weeks. Working together we can come up with common-sense solutions that will provide Montanans some relief from rising health care costs – without compromising access to the courts.

It's not going to happen overnight. It's going to take time and work. But we're going to roll up our sleeves and work together to get real results.

My commitment to ensuring all Montanans and Americans have equal access to justice is also why I've decided to oppose the class action reform bill currently pending in the Senate. I believe that bill will create hurdles and delays that will make it much harder for the ordinary citizen in Montana to gain access to the courts.

The Class Action bill in its current form would allow nearly all class actions to be removed to federal court -- often far away from the home state or hometown of the plaintiff. It would have destroyed the states' ability to protect citizens under state laws. I believe the bill goes too far. I just can't support it.

This is particularly important in light of what has happened recently with companies like Touch America. And it's another reason I'm opposed to the Class Action reform bill in the Senate. Folks have really been hit hard by the Touch America bankruptcy. The new Class Action reforms would deny many of these hard working Montanans their day in court. And that's just not right.

During my time here in the Senate, my number one priority has always been Montana. Montana comes first.

It's been working together to create more good, high-paying jobs. Provide a better education for our kids. Doing what's right for our people. We've been busy this summer working on a prescription drug benefit for seniors on Medicare -- especially those in rural areas. Our seniors shouldn't have to choose between paying their bills and buying prescription drugs. It's simple. And I'm working to do something about it.

Finally, a quick update on my top priority: boosting Montana's economy.

This fall, I'll lead "Big Sky Sales Trips" to several states to draw new businesses and jobs to Montana. To start, we're going to Austin to meet with the Dell Corporation. Minneapolis to meet with business leaders from Target. New York to meet with Citigroup. And Seattle to meet with GE. We're going to work to bring new businesses and jobs to Montana. Get out and sell our state.

I always appreciate your input. Hey, you're my bosses. I'll be home in August getting around the state and I hope to see you.

Good luck everybody! Have a good convention! Get some good work done! I hope to see you all soon!

All the best.